LESLIE THOMAS BRIDGMAN (1913-1978)

Thomas Bridgman was born in Plymouth, Devon on 20 May 1773. The son of Thomas and Catherine Bridgman, he was baptised at Batter Street Presbyterian chapel in Plymouth on 15 July of the same year. He married Hannah Grey at Ellingham, in Hampshire, on 17 September 1799. It is not clear how the couple had met, since travel over such long distances was difficult, and hence uncommon, at this time. There were no cars or railways, and transport was mainly by horse-drawn carts on unmade roads. There were no telephones, and no telegraph or postal system.

The couple returned to Devon, where their son Thomas Grey Bridgman was born in 1811. They later retired to Lanlivery near Bodmin in Cornwall, where Thomas died in 1844 and Hannah in 1865. Thomas may have had family links in Lanlivery, as there are many earlier records of Bridgman families in the area, including the baptism of a Thomas son of John Bridgman in Roche in 1573.

Their son Thomas Bridgman married Elizabeth Bate at Stoke Damerel in Devon on 2 March 1835, and the couple lived and worked in Lanlivery. Their son Thomas Bate Bridgman was baptised there on 28 January 1841. Elizabeth died in 1857, and Thomas married again. He worked all his life as an agricultural labourer and died in Lanlivery in 1883.

Thomas Bate Bridgman married Grace Ann Fragle, a miner's daughter from Hennock at Newton Abbot, Devon in 1864. They had several children in Hennock, before moving to Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire, where Thomas worked as an iron ore miner. There were seven children in all, including their son, Joshua Fragle Bridgman who was born in Barrow-in-Furness in 1880. The use of the mother's maiden name as a second forename was a regular feature of the Bridgman family, though the spelling of Fragel varied over time. Grace died in Barrow-in-Furness in 1900. Thomas was still living there as a widower in April 1911, but died in Gower, Glamorgan, early in 1912.

In 1899, Joshua emigrated to Loretta, Michigan, where he married Jennie Anderson in 1902. Jennie was the daughter of Hans Anderson and Emma Johnson, who had both been born in Sweden before emigrating to the USA and marrying there on 8 July 1881. At the wedding, Emma was heavily pregnant with Jennie who was born in Ishpeming, Michigan on 5th August of the same year.

Joshua and Jennie had their first daughter, Grace, in Loretta in 1903 before moving to Iron Mountain, Michigan. There they had further children – Gordon in 1908 and twins Mildred and Milton in 1911.

There seems to have been a history of twins in the Anderson family, as Jennie had twin brothers Arved and Arndt.

At Iron Mountain Joshua and Jennie were naturalised as American citizens. They later moved to Iowa where their fifth child Leslie Thomas Bridgman was born on 13 November 1913. Joshua applied for an American passport in 1914 and in August 1916, leaving his family in Iowa, he sailed for the United Kingdom. He settled in Swansea working as a herbalist with his brother Thomas. Thomas had originally moved to Swansea as a harness maker, but by 1911 had established a herbalist practice there.

Herbalism was very prevalent in South Wales at this time. Since antiquity, Welsh people had placed a great deal of faith in what they described as water doctors, who diagnosed ailments from the analysis of urine samples and prescribed appropriate herbal remedies.

Jennie and the children eventually joined Joshua in 1923, by which time he had moved to Neath and set up his own herbalist practice. The family lived at 16 Cimla Road, Neath.

Jennie made at least four return trips to the US in the next 25 years, and died in Neath in 1964, age 82. Joshua died early in 1939, age 58, and his son Leslie took over his practice.

The Neath Guardian of 6 January of that year reported – “Bridgman was the sixth generation of a Lancashire family of herbalists and his brother, T. E. Bridgman was also a herbalist, in Swansea. Upon J. F. Bridgman’s death his practice went to his son” – illustrating how important it is to rely only on original sources when compiling family histories.

Leslie had married Phyllis, the sixth child of Isaac and Elizabeth Ann Jones, in 1937. They lived in Victoria Gardens, Neath where they brought up their son John. Leslie died age 64 in 1978.

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